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How repetitive political rhetoric holds back \$830 million from saving education jobs.

by [Fred Badlissi](#)

Quick: Ask yourself, "What do Texas and South Carolina both have in common?"

Both states are nuts about barbecue, but most Texans know better than to give that name to pork. Both have threatened succession from the Union, but South Carolina was the first to live the dream in 1860. The answer is that Texas and South Carolina carry the distinction of being the only two states not to benefit from the [Education Jobs Fund](#), a \$10 billion fund created by Congress last year to help local education agencies hire and retain teachers and other public school employees. South Carolina never sent the required application to claim their share, but Texas did.

Texas was in line to get \$830 million – the equivalent of [13,400 jobs](#) - but the state hasn't seen a dime. The money got caught in the partisan politics of stimulus spending. Mindful of the way Gov. Perry and the Texas Legislature

[used](#)

the \$14 billion in ARRA stimulus funding to paper over the state budget deficit in 2009, Congressman Lloyd Doggett, D-Austin, secured a Texas-specific provision in the

[Act](#)

that required that the funds be used for their intended purpose. Specifically, the "Texas Save Our Schools" amendment, as proponents call it, bars Texas from disproportionately cutting education spending or lavishing the money on other programs. Doggett's fear was that Perry would treat the funds as a \$830 million blank check.

But (surprise?) Perry [didn't like it](#), and [treated](#) the move as grist for his anti-fed mill. In September, Attorney General Greg Abbott

[sue](#)

[d the federal government](#)

, arguing that the Doggett amendment

[asks too much of the governor's authority](#)

and that it discriminates against Texas.

"Texas will not surrender to Washington's one-size-fits-all, deficit-spending mindset or let Washington do to the Texas budget what they have done to the federal budget," Perry proclaimed at the time.

Well, since then there's been a landmark election and Republicans now run in the show in the U.S. House. This past weekend at 4 a.m. on Saturday morning, U.S. House Rep. Michael Burgess, R-Lewisville, along with 234 of his closest party-line friends, [voted](#) to keep money from the current budget from being used to enforce the provision, which he and other Republicans call the "Anti-Texas" provision or the "Doggett Act." Burgess and Perry say that this kills the amendment, while Doggett says that it has no effect as it is written.

But while an ultimate resolution to this may be far off, one lesson is clear. Perry and Burgess' behavior highlights the state's love/hate relationship toward federal money.

First, the governor had no qualms about taking *billions* – that's nine zeros – from the Recovery Act (aka, "the Obama stimulus") to plug up the state budget. But when that zero count becomes six,

millions, his views suddenly shift. In 2009, even as the Texas Workforce Commission faced depletion, Perry asked the federal government for a loan following the rejection of [\\$550](#)

[million grant in federal stimulus funds](#)

. While the grant would have required some [changes](#)

to the way unemployment benefits were calculated, it was also seen as a way to safeguard Texas' benefits. Upon rejecting the funds, Perry said "The last thing they need right now is for government to burden [small business owners] with higher taxes." Since rejecting the grant, TWC's average unemployment tax for businesses per employee has

[more than doubled](#)

from .99% in 2009 to 2.03% in 2011.

Burgess and the new Republican majority in Congress are [taking credit](#) for liberating that \$830 million, though Burgess was initially

[against it](#)

, citing disdain for any type of "bailout." Since other states in the union are getting money, Burgess says that Texas

[shouldn't be singled out.](#)

. There's a contradiction here involving the independent spirit of a Lone Star and the mental image of a bandwagon. Some might call it "political expediency."

So will Texas teachers and other education employees ever see that \$830 million? That's a serious question that deserves an honest answer. But until the Texas Legislature can fully commit to anti-stimulus rhetoric or to accepting a helping hand, well ... I hope you like reruns.